



Garden project unites community

By Howard McEwen • Enquirer contributor • June 14, 2010

HIGHLAND HEIGHTS - Fifty-two green thumbs are tending to three collaborative garden projects located around Highland Heights.

The gardens are part of a new program called Northern Kentucky Community Garden Committee, a joint venture Northern Kentucky University, the Campbell County Cooperative Extension Office, Asbury United Methodist Church and the city of Highland Heights.

"The NKCG not only provides the opportunity for healthy, sustainable food, but also acts as a catalyst for community engagement and developing partnerships between community organizations, students groups, families, and individuals," said Maggie Gough, student wellness manager at NKU.

The gardens are located near Callahan Residence Hall on the NKU campus, behind Asbury United Methodist Church and at the corner of Main Street and Renshaw in Highland Heights.

"A very unique thing happens when people have a place to congregate such as this," Gough said. "We find a sense of belonging to our place of work or residence which leads us to an eagerness to know our co-workers and neighbors."

She is growing tomatoes, eggplant, carrots, cucumber, cantaloupe, watermelon, okra, beets, and zucchini in the NKCG garden.

"The garden benefits me not only in providing space for a hobby, but also by providing fresh produce that has not been contaminated with chemical pesticides or fertilizers," she said. "I was also excited to participate in the community garden because I had hoped to learn more about gardening from other people. This has certainly been the case as I have received advice not only from agents at the extension office, but also from fellow gardeners, whom I've met both in the garden, as well as through the e-mail list."

Melanie Caldwell, who lives in Independence but works on the NKU campus as the director of the Early Childhood Center, gardens with her children and appreciates the organic nature of the gardens.

"They could have a strawberry picked and in their mouth before you know it," she said. "Not having to worry about chemicals on the fruits and veggies or in the soil where the kids are digging and playing it a great relief."

She also uses the garden to teach her children.

"We want the kids to see where their food comes from so they can understand that it is grown in the ground and isn't magically produced at the

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grocer or from a drive-through window," she said.

Gough said the gardens are "the type of engagement the community and university craves."

"Beyond that, wellness is a strategic priority of the university; allowing people who live and work here the opportunity to garden, also provides them with an education about where their food comes from, ways in which they can relieve stress, and get physical activity."

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